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Boele van Hensbroek, Pieter

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## **Some Nineteenth Century African Philosophers<sup>1</sup>**

Pieter Boele van Hensbroek

University of Groningen

Several West-African intellectuals obtained great fame in the second half of the nineteenth century and are of lasting importance for African philosophy. Their work covered a range of fields, such as religion, culture, race, science, technology and politics, and addressed pressing issues related to the rapid rise of European domination. Such issues came up first in Liberia and in European colonial settlements along the West African coast, while becoming the central concern in most of Africa when European domination became established in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Key authors in this period, such as Edward Blyden, Africanus Horton, James Johnson, and Alexander Crummell, developed comprehensive arguments that can be considered classical positions on the issue of an African response to the West.

The nineteenth century was an exceptionally turbulent age in African history. The established political and economic structures were overturned, Islam and Christianity gained influence. A wide variety of smaller political units were clustered into a limited number of states, such as the Fulani empire of Sokoto, the Tokolor, the Mandinka, and Asante empires in West Africa, as well as a number of large kingdoms in East and Central Africa. Western powers and ideas that remained in the margin of the physical and intellectual landscape at the beginning of the nineteenth century occupied the centre at its close.

There has been elaborate philosophical thought in African societies at least since ancient Egyptian times, taking forms probably as diverse as African societies. The emergence of Western domination in the nineteenth century created a new situation, it raised a new and common agenda for reflection for African intellectuals. The ideas of these intellectuals who wrote in European languages have often been attributed to an influx of European ideas resulting from trade, mission, intermarriage, and studies abroad [Shepperson 1960; Clapham 1970]. Some African authors have

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expressed disdain for the ideas of what they called 'a hybridised species' and 'deserters of their fatherland' [Ayandele 1971]. Others have stressed the originality of these African intellectuals and have identified the roots of their discourses within the contemporary local political situation [Langley 1973; Boele van Hensbroek 1999]. Whatever the assessment and the political roots, the impact of European languages and discourses upon intellectual life had a practically irreversible influence upon African thought. Even arguments in favour of preserving African identity and traditions were framed within the parameters of these new discourses, for instance using concepts such as 'tribe', 'chief', and 'civilisation.'

Liberia and Sierra Leone have been the first context within which this new type of African discourses developed. Liberia was founded in 1817 by Africans who had returned from slavery in the United States, and declared its independence in 1847. Sierra Leone had, since 1787, become the place for resettlements of several groups of African origin, initially a relatively small group of Africans freed from slavery after its abolition in the UK, later groups of so-called "recaptives." Recaptives were Africans who had been captured and sold as slaves, but intercepted by the British navy during its mission against slavery and released in Sierra Leone.

Intellectual expression in these small coastal enclaves (as well as in the coastal cities of the Gold Coast and Nigeria a little later) with a relatively large margin of freedom became trend-setting for later discussions elsewhere in Africa [Fyfe 1962, 1972]. Because intellectual developments in South Africa, French West Africa and in East Africa came later and did not produce markedly different positions, the discussion is limited here to the main authors in West Africa writing in English.

### *Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell*

The most celebrated and influential intellectual in West Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century was a flamboyant self-made and self-educated Liberian who became the most prominent West African ideologue opposing dominant European paternalism: Edward Wilmot Blyden [Lynch 1967, 1971, 1978; July 1964, 1968]. Blyden was born on St. Thomas in the Caribbean in 1832. After being blocked from studying Theology in the USA because of his colour, he went to the free republic of Liberia to work for the Pan-Negro ideal. Arriving in 1851, only a few years after independence, Blyden taught at the Presbyterian Alexander Highschool, was

ordained a priest, taught himself Latin, Greek and Arabic and quickly became a public figure.

Liberia's capital, Monrovia, was a small settlement living in near constant antagonism with the inland African population and its internal politics was marked by a new color-line between lighter and darker skinned Liberians, while indigenous Africans held no citizenship rights (unless 'acculturated'). Blyden, being very black, sided against the 'mulatto' ruling caste in often bitter struggles. Blyden and the prominent black missionary Alexander Crummell saw the complete integration of 'natives' in educational and missionary efforts as central to the Pan-Negroist movement that was to spread from Liberia to the rest of Africa. Therefore, they both engaged actively in church work among the indigenous Africans.

Blyden had to fly to Sierra Leone in 1871 when president Roye was overthrown and killed. In Freetown, he established the newspaper 'The Negro' and made several official government missions into the interior, always urging the British government to expand its influence. He ran for presidency in Liberia in 1885 but lost and lived mostly in Sierra Leone for the rest of his life. Blyden became a highly respected man with contacts among the most important figures in West Africa and outside, yet he was practically penniless when he died in 1912.

Blyden's thought, in all its stages, centered around the idea of race, race-pride, love of the Fatherland (Africa) and belief in a brilliant African renaissance. He held the view that every race is a natural unit, having its own 'home' continent, character and mission. Therefore, Blyden is often considered the precursor of Negritude and of the idea of anti-racist racism in the twentieth century [July 1964]. However, Blyden's thought can best be understood against the background of the historical process of establishing European domination in Africa, a process that involved the high-spirited missionary drive of the Christian Abolitionist and Humanitarian movements in the mid-nineteenth century, the rapid rise of the 'scientific' racist and colonial ideologies, and the full establishment of colonial rule in most parts of Africa around the turn of the century.

When Blyden arrived in Liberia to serve the Pan-Negroist cause, his frame of mind fully expressed Christian Abolitionism. Blyden preached that, following the dictates of Providence, *Negritia* or *Ethiopia* soon "stretches out her hands unto God" and will be reborn. Slavery itself was considered to be part of this divine plan, because it was through the New World slavery experience that "the sons of Ham"

could absorb Christianity in order to effect the regeneration of the African continent. At the same time as being a Christian Abolitionist, Blyden was a Pan-Negroist striving for the reunification of black peoples all over the world. The Pan-Negroism brought to Africa derived from the New World slavery experience involved the 'color-line' and a racial self-definition of Africans. Both Abolitionism and Pan-Negroism provide a view of Africa from a position outside of Africa, positioning Africa and Africans within grand, originally European or New World, dichotomies, namely *civilised* - *primitive* and *black* - *white* respectively. The early Christian Pan-Negroists, such as Blyden and Crummell, made a peculiar combination of Abolitionism and Pan-Negroism by applying the civilised - primitive dichotomy **within** the black race, namely between the New World "exiled brethren" "trained for the work of re-building waste place under severe discipline and hard bondage" (= the civilised), and the indigenous Africans who had to be "raised from the slumber of the ages and rescued from a stagnant barbarism" (= the primitive) [Blyden 1887, p.129].

Alexander Crummell remained the purest example of this Pan-Negroist Abolitionism. Crummell, born in New York in 1818, studied at Queen's College Cambridge and came to Liberia in 1853 as teacher and pastor. He was a highly respected black intellectual in the Liberia, the USA and Britain. At one time he aspired to become Episcopal Bishop of Liberia but he was effectively blocked by the American mother church and the Liberian elite. Crummell's thought express excellently the Pan-Negroist Christian Abolitionist approach in castigating slavery and its supportive ideologies while at the same time expressing total confidence in Christianity and Western culture. His famous speech "The English language in Liberia" [Crummell 1862] relates the English language to nation-building and praises it as "the enshrinement of those great Charters of Liberty which are essential elements of free government, and the main guarantees of personal liberty." Crummell's estimation of African cultures was correspondingly low; especially in this earlier years he stressed the role of Africans from the Americas as agents for African upliftment. The diaspora experience, by infusing Christianity in the African race, could thus still benefit Africa. Crummell's theological tracts are best, especially his "The Negro Race Not Under A Curse," [Crummell 1862] which skilfully refutes arguments linking African slavery to the biblical story of the curse pronounced upon Canaan, son of Ham.

Blyden distanced himself gradually from almost every aspect of the Christian Abolitionist discourse. The key to this remarkable development of Blyden's thought was that first-hand knowledge of African life and cultures corrected his negative idea of African culture. He engaged in church work among indigenous Africans in Liberia, travelled inland and to Egypt, studied African history and cultures, and learned Arabic. This exposure made him doubt the Christian abolitionist idea that savage African culture should be replaced by Christianity. In fact, Blyden gradually developed the opposite view, namely that African culture should be *protected* against alien influence. He thus initiated a new, what can be called an 'Afrocentric' or 'African Regeneration', discourse that could become a vehicle for a forceful critique of the missionary (and in principle also the colonial) establishment in West Africa.

The idea of race in Blyden has a number of references: biological, cultural and religious, namely as a God-created unit of humanity

Each race is endowed with peculiar talents, and watchful to the last degree is the great Creator over the individuality, the freedom and independence of each. In the music of the universe, each shall give a different sound, but necessary to the grand symphony. There are several sounds not yet brought out, and the feeblest of all is that hitherto produced by the Negro; but only he can furnish it. And when he furnishes it in its fullness and perfection, it will be welcomed with delight by the world. [Blyden 1903]

As a consequence of his view on race, Blyden saw nothing wrong with the term 'negro'. He even insisted on writing it with a capital N and made it the title of the journal he founded in Freetown. For Blyden "Pride of race" was a dictate of nature as well as a divine commandment. The great challenge for the self-conscious 'Negro' was to bring out, discover and develop this specifically 'African' mode in all aspects of life. In his forceful speeches and writings he would exclaim: "Be yourselves...if you surrender your personality, you have nothing left to give the world," and "the African must advance by the methods of his own. He must possess a power distinct from the European."

Blyden perceived his philosophy to be part of a grand global process of peoples, nations, and races reclaiming their legitimate place in this world. "The feeling is in the atmosphere - the plane in which races move. And there is no people in whom the desire for race integrity and race preservation is stronger than in the

Negro." "Within the last thirty years, the sentiment of race and of nationality has attained wonderful development.... The efforts of men like Garibaldi and Cavour in Italy, of Kossuth in Hungary, of Bismarck in Germany, of the Ashantees and Zulus in Africa, have proved the indestructible vitality and tenacity of race." [Blyden 1887, p.121]

The more radical implications of Blyden's identity philosophy, such as the idea of a specifically African Personality, came forward only later in Blyden's life. The African personality was defined in contrast to the European which was identified as harsh, individualistic, competitive, combative, non-religious and materialistic. Their contribution towards world culture would be that of peacemaker and conservator of the spirituality of the world. In a letter to Booker T. Washington, Blyden wrote:

The spirit of service in the black man is born of his spiritual genius....the supple, yielding, conciliatory, obedient, gentle, patient, musical spirit that is not full of offensive resistance - how sadly the white man needs it!...Let him fight the battle of government on the stump, at the polls and in the legislative halls. Our kingdom in America is not this world. We cannot compete with the Anglo-Saxon. He is so dreadfully determined, so intolerant and self assertive, intent upon carrying his point at all hazards, having good in view of course; but the wheels of his mind and understanding need oiling sadly with the oil of African good nature.

[Lynch 1971, p. 207]

Blyden developed the idea of cultural difference with remarkable consistency, sometimes shocking his contemporary as well as the present-day reader. For instance Christianity, as a Western religion, would not fit Africa well. Blyden saw Islam as better suited to the needs of the African continent. Great African warriors had expelled the conquerors and adjusted Islam to accommodate the social peculiarities of the people. The idea of a divine mandate for the authenticity and the purity of African culture also involves the ideal of purity of race. Blyden turned against wholesale remigration of African-Americans to Africa, against accepting mixed bloods, 'mulattoes', as full 'Negroes,' and in his later life he even favoured the prohibition of inter-racial marriages. In education, Blyden favoured a curriculum specially designed for African students to be taught by Africans in indigenous institutions. In politics, the position was ambiguous. On the one hand, the logic of his position involves the idea of 'Negro' self-assertion and unity and could lead to an

outspoken anti-colonial ideology around the idea of 'Africa for the Africans,' such as Marcus Garvey developed in the USA after the First World War. On the other hand, a consistent elaboration of Blyden's philosophy of racial/cultural difference implied the idea that Africans should leave politics to the race that excels in this area, namely the Europeans.

Thus, Ethiopia and Ethiopians, having always served, will continue to serve the world. The Negro is, at the moment, the opposite of the Anglo-Saxon.

Those everywhere serve the world; these everywhere govern the world.... The one serves mankind by ruling; the other serves mankind by serving. The one wears the crown and wields the sceptre; the other bears the stripes and carries the cross. [Blyden 1887, p. 120]

According to the providential scheme of things, the British had a historical task in Africa to facilitate education, trade and the creation of a great unified West African state. However, Blyden expected that whites would be physically unfit to settle permanently on the African continent so the colonialism that got fully established towards the end of his life would be "by nature" a temporary phenomenon. Blyden's forceful positions on such issues as an African church, an African curriculum, an African personality, history and high culture, as well as his ideas on race pride and non-acculturation, were striking the heart of paternalistic rule in the proto-colonial enclaves on the West African Coast between 1870 and 1900, and were embraced by the discriminated African "educated elite". However, when colonialism became established around 1900, when fully fledged administrative, legal, military and economic structures were being imposed, then the *political* rather than the *cultural* aspects of colonial rule became the primary issue.

Blyden's development constitutes a long journey from abolitionist *cultural imperialism* to *cultural nationalism*, from a view of Africa as still having to acquire everything to the view that Africa, in principle, has everything already, from an evolutionary discourse to an essentialist discourse, from a standard narrative of an outsider preaching to Africans to civilise and Christianise, to a standard narrative of an African for outsiders. Blyden's development came to its consistent conclusion in *African Life and Customs* (1908) which is a superbly elegant, idealised presentation of 'the' African way of life, covering its various aspects one by one, and showing its intricate balance, wisdom and perfect adaptation to the African situation. Blyden incorporated from the dominant scientific racist ideology of his time key concepts



('race', 'instinct', 'natural order'), dichotomies (Negro - Anglo-Saxon) and theories (on the 'serving' nature of blacks, the natural home continents of races, the degenerating effects of mixing of races), but he toppled, as it were, the structure of racist discourse by replacing a hierarchical order of races with an order of difference.

### *James Africanus Beale Horton*

The eighteen sixties and seventies constituted an exceptional historical interlude in West Africa because, despite pervasive Western influence, one did not think of the possibility of colonial occupation. The political horizon appeared open, allowing for a process of rapid indigenous modernisation such as the Japanese development or that of Dominions like Australia and Canada. Several events suggested this openness: the British House of Commons decided, in 1865, on a retreat from West Africa, in Gold Coast the Fanti Federation was established in 1870, and in a number of fields Africans proved to compete successfully with Europeans: Ajayi Crowther was ordained bishop, Africanus Horton took a doctorate in Medicine, and a class of successful African business men emerged. The careers of Samuel Lewis, Ajayi Crowther, James Johnson, William "Independent" Grant, G.G.M. Nicol and Africanus Horton refuted in the most concrete form the emerging racist prejudice by showing what Africans and Africa could achieve within a lifetime.

The most comprehensive and tightly argued expression of this self-conscious African "Mid-Victorian Optimism" is found in the ideas of James Africanus Beale Horton. Whether it concerns race, cultural excellence, capitalist spirit, education or politics, he defended a thoroughly universalist position expressing that Africa and Africans would measure up to the highest standards of achievement. [July 1966; Fyfe 1972]

James Beale Horton was born in 1835 from 'recaptive' parents in the village Gloucester in Sierra Leone. His father and mother had been set free from a slave ship. The captives were, as Horton perceived it, "on their arrival in Sierra Leone, landed naked and in a state of abject rudeness and poverty, without the least knowledge of civilisation." [Horton 1868, p. 29, 59] Energetic missionary effort had Christianised and educated them. They had become part of "a nation of free black Christians," a very successful nation. In his sketch of the small settler village Gloucester, the Nigerian historian Ayandele, mentions that by 1821 already,

missionary efforts had been so effective that "500 out of a total population of 720 were able to read their Testaments," a literacy rate not easily matched by any other place in the world in the 1820s.

After attending Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Horton was offered the exceptional chance of studying Medicine in London in order to prepare for service in the British West African forces. When moving from King's College in London to the University of Edinburgh to take a medical doctorate, he added "Africanus" to his name. He was admitted into the British army as staff surgeon in West Africa, making him the highest ranking African in British army service. Horton served at many places along the West African "Coast," acquiring extensive knowledge of the geological, economic, social and political conditions in the coastal zone, and participating according to what his position allowed, in political matters. The Ashanti even offered him the title of Prince. [Fyfe 1972, p. 133] After retirement, he resettled in Freetown, becoming active in the economic field by starting several companies and establishing the first West African bank called the *Commercial Bank of West Africa*. Horton died suddenly in 1883. The main body of Horton's work is contained in the books *West African Countries and Peoples* (1868), containing also his important text "The Negro's Place in Nature," and *Letters on the Political Condition in the Gold Coast* (1870).

The basis of Horton's optimistic and universalistic position was a rather modern conception of race. Whereas his contemporaries defended the case against scientific racism with religious arguments, Horton directly attacked the racist biological claims. As a medical doctor he had no doubt that biological differences between the races are negligible. He knew, therefore, that none of the popular and 'scientific' racist positions explaining Western superiority in his time could have any ground. "It is an incontrovertible logical inference that the difference arises entirely from influences of external circumstances, Truly - *Nature una et communis omnium est.*" [Horton 1868, p. 29] Historical circumstances have been beneficial for rapid civilisational development in the West, but Africa will soon join. Horton believed, with his contemporaries, in a world-historical civilisational progress, but indicated that different peoples contribute to that development. Nations rise and fall; the once flourishing and civilised degenerates into a semi-barbarous state; and those who have lived in utter barbarism, after a lapse of time become the standing nation. At the time of the Romans Britain had existed in a state of hopeless barbarism, yet now it

was the cream of civilisation. Horton quoted Cicero: "that the ancient Britons went about scantily clothed; they painted their bodies in fantastic fashions, 'offered up human victims to uncouth idols, and lived in hollow trees and rude habitations.'" Atticus advised to a friend "not to buy slaves from Britain on account of their stupidity and their inaptitude to learn music and other accomplishments."

Consistent with Horton's turn towards historical explanation and rejection of the idea of basic racial differences, he entertained a very practical idea of civilisation. To be civilised is to be advanced in science, in cultural sophistication, in productive development, and thus to be powerful. Horton's universalistic conception of civilisation translated into a very practical view of what is involved in development, namely to absorb effectively all aspects of civilisation achieved elsewhere and subsequently to improve upon these. For Horton, therefore, Africa's task was to educate, Christianise, industrialise, and acquire wealth: "Buy up the former abodes of their European masters; carry on extensive mercantile speculations; seek after the indulgences of civilised life, and travel in foreign countries to seek after wealth...look out for a better form of government administration."

With his practical turn of mind, Horton suggested a host of initiatives in the educational, economic and political fields. He was well ahead of his time by constantly stressing the need for a very active government policy in education, propagating compulsory education, and the elevation of Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone to a West African university. He greatly valued African entrepreneurship and started several companies himself, such as the *Wassaw Light Railway Company Ltd* and the *Commercial Bank of West Africa*, which he managed himself during the last months of his life.

In politics, according to Horton, development depended on infusing "the true principles of civilised Government," including the election of rulers. Without enlightened and modern government none of the modernising policies which he considered essential would be possible. The 'feudal lords' of the interior tribes would not promote development, neither would a hesitant and inconsistent British colonial policy. The core of Horton's vision was, therefore, the development of modern states in Africa, what he called "that great principle of self-government."

When in 1865 a Select Committee of the British House of Commons concluded that Britain should retreat from West Africa, Horton took up the challenge to give a blueprint for West African states. His major work, *West African Countries*

*and Peoples* (1868), provides detailed suggestions for the institutional set-up appropriate to each of the future states. It offered a complete plan that the British would permit, supervise and protect. It would create a number of 'Dominions' within the British Commonwealth in West Africa, entitled to an equal position as the white dominions such as Canada and Australia. In another development, in 1868, rulers and intellectuals in the coastal regions of the Gold Coast established the Fanti Confederation, indicating their political agenda in the Mankessim Constitution in October 1871. Horton published his letters to the Colonial Office in defence of the Federation in a book called *Letters on the Political Condition of the Gold Coast*.

However, the Fanti leaders were arrested, the Confederation collapsed in 1873 and Fantiland became a protectorate while Ashanti was beaten in 1874. Colonial influence expanded rapidly and racist ideology spread. Horton's optimistic and pragmatic approach quickly lost appeal. He was considered a so-called "Black Englishman" and became forgotten completely.

#### *John Mensah Sarbah and Joseph Casely Hayford*

A next phase in the intellectual process in West Africa developed under quite different historical conditions. After the second Ashanti War (1874), initially won by Ashanti, actual colonial rule became established before the end of the century in most countries in Africa. In the Gold Coast, this development was somewhat more complicated than elsewhere (except Senegal) because the relationship between the African rulers in the region and British were laid down in agreements, in particular in the Bond of 1844. The encroachment of British power was in fact a direct violation of these agreements. Intellectuals and traditional rulers alike resisted several key Gold Coast government laws. Western educated intellectuals turned to the serious study of traditional institutions, legal systems, and languages and became great defenders of these in the face of the "great disorganisation of society" effected by several British laws.

John Mensah Sarbah (1864-1910), an erudite Fanti barrister trained in London, played a leading role in the opposition. He was involved in founding the first political organisations under colonial rule, the Mfantasi Amanbuhu Fékuw (Fanti National Political Society) in 1889 and the *Aborigines Rights Protection Society* in 1898, as well as in establishing the newspaper *The Gold Coast People* in 1891. In

the framework of protest against the colonial Land Bills, he published his *Fanti Customary Law* (1897) "to reduce into writing the Customary Laws and Usages of the Fanti, Ashanti, and other Akan inhabitants of the Gold Coast." To this sophisticated description of the Akan social and legal system he added in a number of appendices the key historical documents and treaties, thus proving the case that the Gold Coast has never been conquered by the British and dismissing the legality of their encroachment on indigenous rule. In 1906 Sarbah published another important work, *Fanti National Constitution*, to describe "the principles controlling and regulating the Akan State."

Joseph Casely Hayford was another exemplary representative of the early Gold Coast educated elite. Hayford was a journalist, Cambridge trained lawyer and an important politician, the "uncrowned king of West Africa" during the first three decades of this century. Beyond being a political leader, Casely Hayford was probably the most comprehensive and representative political theorist of these decades in British West Africa: eloquent, sophisticated, witty and, where necessary, he made extensive reference to historical fact. He wrote *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (1903), *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), *The Truth about the West African Land Question* (1913) and *United West Africa* (1919).

Hayford's *Gold Coast Native Institutions* described the sophisticated Ashanti and Fanti political procedures, containing their own 'checks and balances', and mechanisms that promote thorough political deliberation. Typically, Casely Hayford gave an enthusiastic description of the role of the "Linguist" (or "Speaker"), especially in the Ashanti system. "The Linguist is the most important personage of the Native State. He is in some cases more influential than the Chief....He is generally the repository, or, if you like, a walking encyclopedia, of all traditional knowledge...his knowledge embraces the political history of the whole State, as well as of sister States." [Hayford 1970, p. 68] His speeches will sparkle with humour. He is the master in "the art of 'linguistic' oratory" and creative in guiding the discussion to reach a balanced conclusion.

Casely Hayford's inspired representation suggests that the educated elite were not outside the traditional system but right at its centre. Thus, he welded together the two major forces in indigenous politics in one model. For the 'educated sons of the nation' there was an important role "to serve his countries cause" as councillor, advisor, or linguist. Hayford also suggested to surpass other divisions, such as

between Fanti and Ashanti. His *description* is simultaneously a nationalist *construction*, namely a conscious attempt to establish a **national** Fanti-Ashanti tradition.

Casely Hayford's most exceptional book appeared in 1911, *Ethiopia Unbound*. It is an appeal to Africans to actually turn to their heritage to create the future; an appeal in the form of a magnificent fictional and partly autobiographical work. Casely Hayford's conclusion was clear: there is no alternative for the Gold Coast except to build on the indigenous tradition. There is "no healthy growth except from within."

From the philosophical point of view, the discourse of Sarbah and Casely Hayford is particularly interesting. The nineteenth century ideologies, represented by Horton and Blyden, suggested a choice between *modernisation* and *African tradition*, while neither provided a forceful framework for political action in a situation characterised by colonial penetration. The way out was shown by intellectuals such as Mensah Sarbah and Casely Hayford. They suggested that there is no contradiction between tradition and modernisation. African traditions, they argued, are perfectly able to adjust in their own way to modern times, if only given the chance. The key problem was a political one, namely that the fair chance of "working out our own salvation as a people" was denied to them. The Gold Coast intellectuals wanted to renovate indigenous political traditions as the basis for an indigenous path to modernisation, just like the Japanese who, while facing the threat of modernised Europe, revolutionised their *own* culture under Méidji rule.

This grand ideological option of *modernisation-from-indigenous-roots* involved a statement of the vitality belonging to indigenous traditions that is reminiscent of Blyden, but it was in fact different. Rather than affirming a **general** African identity as different from the European, Sarbah and Hayford wanted to show the vitality of specific Fanti and Ashanti traditions as a basis for actually organising social and political life on the Coast. Whereas Blyden was making a cultural statement on behalf of Africa as a whole, Sarbah and Hayford were formulating a national political alternative for the Gold Coast.

However, the historical chances for this alternative had already disappeared by 1900. As J.B. Danquah analysed the situation thirty years later: "the age in which an independent national consciousness dawned upon the Gold Coast people came to an end in 1897." "The Gold Coast people had effectively become part of the

Empire, and for weal or woe, what they could best do to foster the national cause and liberty was to work from within the British constitution itself for a liberal recognition of our right and capacity to direct our destiny within an Empire of free nations and not as a subject Colony forming the "pocket borough" of the English Parliament." [Danquah 1932, p. 18 and p. 20]. Colonialism had become the dominant reality. Preservation of indigenous political systems was replaced by a struggle to attain national independence.

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